

1. The school has established a school-wide program for building a positive and safe learning environment. The program, "Reaching Out in Harmony," involves the establishment of a bully free climate, as well as a consistent method of solving normal conflicts. Despite the serious effects of bullying, most schools have made little or no attempt to deal with the problem in a comprehensive manner. Our program is unique in many aspects:

- It involves all stakeholders – students, teachers, support staff, administrators and parents.
- It uses school-wide activities and celebrations to reinforce the message.
- It allows students to take ownership for maintaining a positive school climate.
- It promotes a system-wide ethos – Bullying is not an acceptable behavior.
- It addresses two types of conflict – the conflict involving the bully/victim and normal conflict.

The objectives of the program are:

- To build respect for oneself, others and the greater community.
- To empower students with the pro-social skills necessary to solve normal conflicts independently while enabling them to seek help when confronted with conflicts involving an imbalance of power.
- To decrease the number of bullying incidents.
- To encourage students to solve problems through conflict resolution and mediation.
- To provide students with opportunities to see how their choices and actions affect their school, home and/or community environment.
- To improve the overall school climate.

The program was introduced the first week of the 2000-2001 school year with "Respect Week." The number one school rule, "Respect everyone in the school community," was the focus of the week. Each day teachers delivered lessons on what it meant to be respectful in the classroom, in the cafeteria, on the playground and on the bus. Each class wrote their own "Respect Pledge" which they had a chance to recite on our daily morning broadcast.

The next step was to establish an awareness of bullying behavior. The staff received in-service training from the student assistance counselor and the principal on recognizing bullying and teasing. A team of four staff members received training in conflict resolution. The core team then prepared a set of essential lessons that would have to be delivered in order to meet the program objectives. They turnkeyed the training for the rest of the staff.

All teachers taught lessons on how to identify a bully and strategies for dealing with bullies. Students were taught the important difference between tattling and telling and were encouraged to report bullying behavior.

Later lessons empowered the children with the tools to deal with conflict. All children were taught the characteristics and consequences of passive, aggressive and assertive behavior. They learned to assert themselves with an "I message," and the steps to conflict resolution. Peace tables were established in every classroom. This area was designated as a place to try to solve conflicts independently using the Win/Win Guidelines. The members of the high school National Honor Society painted these guidelines on the path leading to our "Peaceful Playground."

Once teachers delivered the essential lessons they used the existing curriculum in language arts and social studies to reinforce the ideas where applicable. This is another unique feature of the program. It can fit easily into the existing curriculum and requires no additional expense to implement.

After students had applied their pro-social skills in the classroom setting, parents received training at PTA meetings. Parents were then able to reinforce these skills when normal conflict arose at home.

Various spirit days, assemblies and school activities reinforced the concepts being taught. For example, during a school-wide anti-bullying campaign, students designed their own anti-bullying buttons. Each classroom decorated their doors with anti-bullying slogans and posters. Another school-wide activity involved adopting a charity. This allowed students the opportunity to see how their kind actions could contribute to the greater community. The school also took part in the Kindness and Justice Challenge in which all students earned candy kisses for performing acts of kindness. The kisses were collected in large jars. At the end of the ten-day challenge each class jar was brought to an assembly. The students could see the thousands of kind acts they had performed. For the remainder of the year, the children received the kisses as they displayed kind behavior – teaching them that kindness is often repaid. The school's culminating activity was the planting of a peace pole in the courtyard.

This school year also began with "Respect Week." The same set of essential lessons were taught during September and October. They are being reinforced through this year's school theme, "Be a Hero." School activities and assemblies continue to support our message. For example, this year during anti-bullying week, students saw a presentation of the play, "Tough." Each class designed an anti-bullying mural that is proudly displayed in the hallway or in their classroom. Each month students are named, "Heroes of the Month." In order to receive this designation, students must show respect for all members of the school community, work to solve conflicts peacefully, stand up for what is right and put into action the pro-social skills they have developed.

The most important thing about our program is that it is more than just an activity. It is a part of the school culture.

Reaching Out in Harmony promotes higher student achievement. With the fear of being bullied reduced, students are able to focus on academics. Because students are equipped to solve conflicts independently, teachers spend less time on discipline and more time on instruction.

2. The following Core Curriculum Content Standards are addressed through this program:
Comprehensive Health and Physical Education Standard 2.2.

- Students learn to resolve conflicts. They use “health enhancing personal, interpersonal and life skills to initiate and maintain healthy relationships.”
- Program Example: Students learn the steps of conflict resolution and are given the opportunity to apply these steps independently or with the assistance of mediation. They also learn the use of appropriate assertive behavior through the use of “I messages.”

Cross Content Workplace Readiness Standard 1

- Students “demonstrate employability skills such as work ethic, dependability and getting along with others needed to get and keep a job.”
- Program example: Students learn pro-social skills that allow them to get along with others. For example, lessons are given on active listening, taking responsibility and working cooperatively to solve a problem.

Cross Content Workplace Readiness Standard 3

- Students learn to “recognize problems, devise a variety of ways to solve these problems, analyze potential advantages and disadvantages of each alternative, and evaluate the effectiveness of the method ultimately selected.
- Program example: One of the steps in resolving a conflict is to brainstorm solutions. Those involved in the conflict must then choose the best solution. The program is also tied to our discipline policy. Clear rules and consequences are part of a contract each student and parent sign in September. Students who do not choose the best course of action are asked to fill out a “Think About It “ form. They are asked why their behavior was inappropriate and what they could have done instead.

Cross Content Workplace Readiness Standard 4

- Students learn about actions that “demonstrate respect for people of different races, age, religions, ethnicity and gender.” They also learn to “evaluate their own actions” and “work cooperatively to accomplish a goal.”
- Program example: Our whole program revolves around the number one school rule, “Respect for everyone in the school community.” Literature and social studies lessons are used to reinforce this idea throughout the

year. When discussing bullying and teasing, students learn that bullies often use differences (race, religion, etc.) to attack their victims.

Core standards in areas such as language arts, social studies and visual and performing arts are also addressed as teachers in these areas use lessons to reinforce pro-social skills.

Please note: Quotes are taken directly from the descriptive statement of the standard or the cumulative progress indicators for each standard.

3. In 1999, students in grade 3 – 5 filled out a “Bully Survey.” Results indicated that approximately 8% the students recalled being teased on a regular basis. 26% of the students reported being hurt by another child at least once during the school year. This survey indicated a need to establish a bully free climate, as well as a consistent method to solve normal conflicts. The following assessment measures provide evidence that our program’s objectives have been met:

- A school wide survey indicated that 89% of the staff see a decrease in bullying behavior. 100% hear students using “I messages” and conflict resolution skills. 100% of the staff spend less time resolving student conflicts. 100% see an improvement in the school climate.
- The number of mediations conducted during the first year of the program almost tripled, from 24 to 66. Clearly more students were using peaceful means to solve their conflicts.
- In 2001, students in grades 3 –5 completed the “Bully Survey” again. The student data indicated a 7% decrease in physical bullying behavior. This is consistent with the staff’s perceptions.
- The students participated in 13 activities that provided them with opportunities to see how their actions affected their school and community environment.

4. This program can be easily replicated. In fact, all of the elementary schools in the district have adopted the program this year. We have developed a binder containing the essential pro-social skills lessons that are necessary for program implementation. They include: cooling off, using I Messages, recognizing bullying, telling vs tattling and using the steps of conflict resolution. Training in both of these areas, as well as peer mediation, is also available free of charge through the New Jersey Bar Association. Our school’s program has been used as a model during this training.

Each school can build this program around a theme of their choice. The key to success is the delivery of the same set of lessons so that the school builds a common language to be used when dealing with conflict. Although there are only five core lessons involved, they must be taught to every student and reinforced by every staff member from principal to custodian. It is this consistency and reinforcement that make the behaviors an integral part of the school culture. Activities and school spirit days should be coordinated to reinforce the theme. We have established a theme committee to work on this part of the program.

A parent training session should be held so conflict resolution skills can be reinforced at home.